

This letter appeared in the Ames Tribune July 6, 2005

YOUR LETTERS

Counterfeit science

TO THE EDITOR

“**T**he Privileged Planet,” a book by Guillermo Gonzalez (assistant professor of physics at Iowa State University) and Jay W. Richards (theologian with the Seattle-based Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture) is (in the writer’s opinion) easily the most significant book of counterfeit science I have read in the last decade.

Both authors have long been active in the so-called Wedge movement of creationists who are infuriated that science no longer admits supernatural or God-based explanations of any kind, nor even any Intelligent Design arguments, such as were first popularized by the 19th century Anglican theologian, William Paley.

To those ignorant of the history and logic of modern science, the Intelligent Design arguments and inferences championed in “The Privileged Planet” will seem

scientifically sound, even compelling. But the book is religious apologetics from beginning to end, not science at all. And yet it is marketed as a popularly written science book based on the latest findings of astronomy and physics.

I bought a “signed” first edition at Iowa State’s University Bookstore more than a year ago. I promptly read it cover to cover and then wrote and circulated a review replete with poignant criticisms too extensive to include here. Recently, however, the Wedge movement has produced a movie based on the book and hopes to screen it in churches, high schools, colleges, science centers and other venues across the U. S. So much controversy erupted when the Smithsonian recently co-sponsored a screening, that the Institution promptly withdrew from the co-sponsorship agreement.

For details on the origin and history the Wedge movement, interested readers should consult “Creationism’s

Trojan Horse: The Wedge of Intelligent Design,” by philosophy professor Barbara Forrest and investigative journalist Paul R. Gross (Oxford University Press, 2004).

In addition to identifying the Wedge’s most prominent leaders and activists, the book also identifies many of the wealthy backers — foundations and individuals — that have enabled ID/Wedge creationists to market their views as science, despite the scientific poverty of their claims. Of these, perhaps multi-billionaire Howard Fieldstead Ahmanson, Jr., is the most appropriate one to mention here.

First of all, Howard married a central Iowan, the former Roberta Green of Perry. Thanks to her (and Howard’s money, presumably) the Hotel Pattee among other buildings in Perry have enjoyed some rather spectacular renovations. Secondly, it was Howard and Roberta who donated crucial seed money to help launch the Wedge movement back in the 1990s.

Finally, in past decades,

Howard Jr., donated generously to the Christian Reconstructionists, back when the late Rousas John Rushdoony led that movement. It was during those years that Howard served — some two decades, I believe — on the board of their think tank, The Chalcedon Foundation.

Why is this relevant? Because the agenda of the Reconstructionists, according to the Chalcedon Foundation journal, was then, and remains now, that of remaking the U. S. into a Christian Theocracy: one that would be governed not by democracy (which they regard as heresy) but by a radical form of Old Testament biblical law.

Though far from being as violent, the Reconstructionists seem to have in mind for Christianity and the U. S. what the Taliban did for Islam and Afghanistan.

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